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Rosenberg Case Linked to Breaking of Soviet Code

By PETER KIHSS

A former official of the Federal Bureau of Investigation has asserted that the United States broke Soviet spy codes in the 1940's and that this led to knowledge of the involvement of Julius and Ethel Rosenberg in an atomic espionage conspiracy. ABC News said yesterday.

The television network said it would broadcast the statement by Robert J. Lamphere, who was with the F.B.I. from 1941 to 1955, next Thursday in a "Closeup" program on J. Edgar Hoover, the late Director of the bureau. The Rosenbergs were electrocuted in 1953.

Asked for comment, Marshall Perlin, counsel for Michael and Robert Meeropol, the Rosenbergs' sons, who are trying to prove that their parents were not guilty, said yesterday that he thought Mr. Lamphere was "fantasizing with his claim," and noted that the Rosenbergs were arrested in 1950, two years after the Soviet codes were reportedly broken.

Mr. Lamphere, who recently retired as a senior vice president of the John Hancock Mutual Life Insurance Company in Boston, sought in 1977 to get clearance from the bureau to write a book, "The F.B.I. vs. the K.G.B. — the Unseen War."

Disclosure Withheld at Trial

Patricia Lynch, the ABC News reporter who interviewed Mr. Lamphere, said yesterday that he had finally gotten clearance, but his book would not be published for another year and a half.

Miss Lynch said Mr. Lamphere asserted that intercepted communications from the K.G.B., the Soviet Union's intelligence and internal-security agency, had convinced the United States of the Rosenbergs' guilt, but that this was withheld at their trial to prevent Soviet knowledge of the code-breaking.

"We knew of the Rosenbergs' in-

volvement with the Soviets through K.G.B. messages, through the testimony of numerous people, so there can be no question about their guilt," Mr. Lamphere reportedly said on tape that is to be broadcast.

Miss Lynch said intelligence and Justice Department sources, whom she declined to name, had told her that a code expert in the old Army Security Agency, working with the charred remains of a Soviet code book found on a Finnish battlefield in World War II, had cracked the Soviet spy codes in 1948. She said the sources maintained that the result was the arrest of the Rosenbergs, along with about 200 others believed to have been Soviet spies.

British Subjects Suspected

A telephone call to Mr. Lamphere's former office in Boston last night led to reports that his whereabouts were not immediately known.

Mr. Perlin, the attorney for the Rosenberg sons, said a story about breaking the Soviet code first circulated about two years ago, without identifying a source. He said he had access to a source in British intelligence who contended that the British had broken the code, leading them to suspect two or three British subjects of spying, but

with "nothing about the Rosenbergs."

For the Rosenberg sons, now 37 and 33 years old, Mr. Perlin has had a lawsuit in Federal District Court in Washington for seven years, seeking access to all files of the Department of Justice, the F.B.I., the former Atomic Energy Commission and other agencies dealing with the Rosenbergs in an effort to disprove any guilt.

Some 29,000 pages of F.B.I. materials were made available late in 1975 as a result, with the first showing strenuous efforts by the bureau to expand charges against the Rosenbergs.

One disclosure was that David Greenlass, the star witness, had told the prosecution before the trial that Ethel Rosenberg, his sister, was not present when he gave Julius Rosenberg a description of the atomic bomb in 1945.

But he then testified at the 1951 trial that she had not only been present, but had also typed his handwritten notes.

In Washington, the F.B.I. news office said there would be no comment. Lane Bonner, supervisory special agent, said he had not known about the Lamphere section of the planned telecast.